

### 3. HEALTH STATUS

## Life expectancy by sex and education level

There remain large gaps in life expectancy between women and men in all OECD countries. On average across OECD countries, life expectancy at birth for women reached 83.1 years in 2013, compared with 77.8 years for men, a gap of 5.3 years (Figure 3.4).

The gender gap in life expectancy increased substantially in many OECD countries during the 1970s and early 1980s to reach a peak of almost seven years in the mid-1980s, but it has narrowed during the past 25 years, reflecting higher gains in life expectancy among men than among women. This can be attributed at least partly to the narrowing of differences in risk-increasing behaviours, such as smoking, accompanied by sharp reductions in mortality rates from cardiovascular diseases among men.

In 2013, the life expectancy for women in OECD countries ranged from less than 80 years in Turkey, Hungary and Mexico to more than 85 years in Japan, Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland. Life expectancy for men ranged from less than 75 years in Mexico, Hungary, Estonia, the Slovak Republic, Poland and Turkey to over 80 years in Switzerland, Iceland, Italy, Israel, Japan, Spain, Sweden and Australia.

In the United States, the life expectancy for both women and men is now slightly shorter than the OECD average, and the gap with leading countries has been widening. The life expectancy for US men in 2013 was 4.3 years shorter than in Switzerland (up from less than three years in 1970); for US women, it was 5.4 years shorter than in Japan in 2013 (there was no gap in 1970). Possible explanations for this slower progress are provided under the indicator “Life expectancy at birth”.

Among OECD countries, the gender gap in life expectancy is relatively narrow in Iceland, Israel, Sweden, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United Kingdom (a gap of less than four years), but much larger in Estonia (around nine years), Poland (around eight years), the Slovak Republic and Hungary (around seven years).

Life expectancy in OECD countries varies not only by gender, but also by socio-economic status as measured, for instance, by education level (Figure 3.5). Higher education level not only provides the means to improve the socio-economic conditions in which people live and work, but may also promote the adoption of healthier lifestyles and facilitate access to appropriate health care. On average among 15 OECD countries for which recent data are available,

people with the highest level of education can expect to live six years longer than people with the lowest level of education at age 30 (53 years versus 47 years). These differences in life expectancy by education level are particularly pronounced for men, with an average gap of almost eight years. The differences are especially large in Central and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Poland), where the life expectancy gap between higher and lower educated men is more than ten years. This is largely explained by the greater prevalence of risk factors among men, such as tobacco and alcohol use. Differences in other countries such as Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and Italy are less pronounced.

### Definition and comparability

Life expectancy at birth measures how long, on average, people would live based on a given set of age-specific death rates. However, the actual age-specific death rates of any particular birth cohort cannot be known in advance. If age-specific death rates are falling (as has been the case over the past decades), actual life spans will be higher than life expectancy calculated with current death rates.

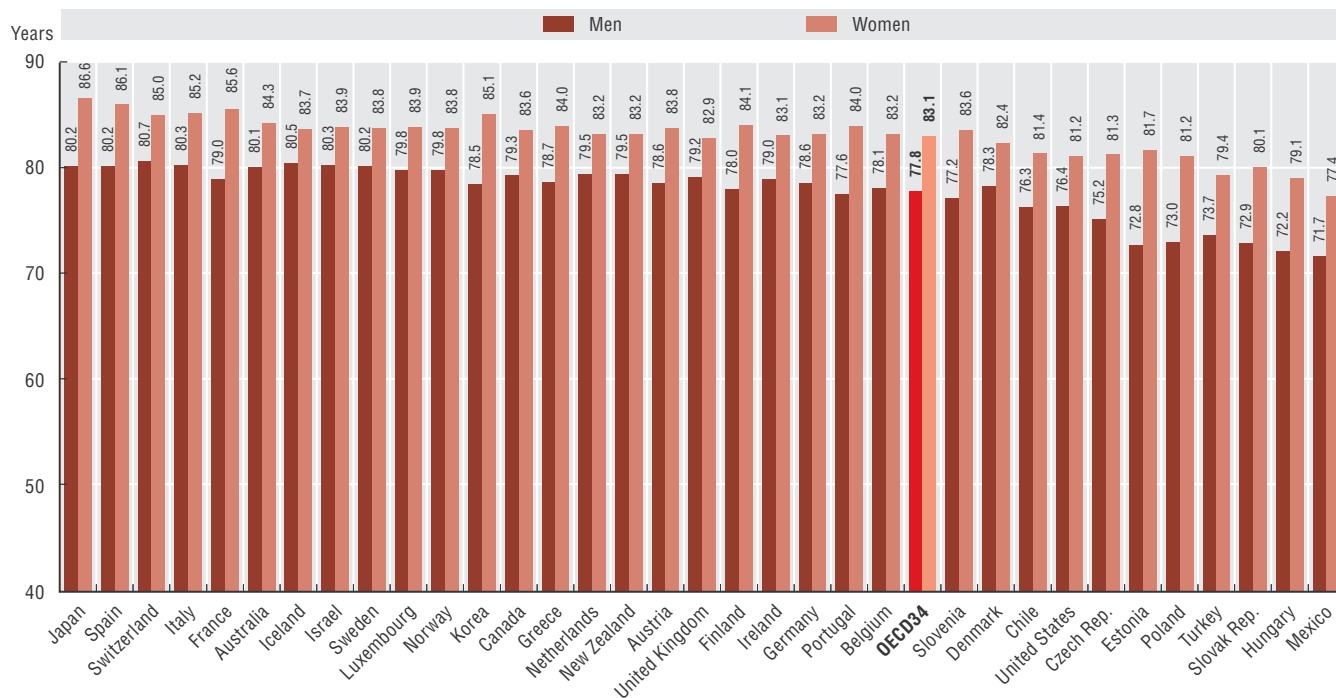
The methodology used to calculate life expectancy can vary slightly between countries. This can change a country's estimates by a fraction of a year.

To calculate life expectancies by education level, detailed data on deaths by sex, age and education level are needed. However, not all countries have information on education as part of their deaths data. Data linkage to another source (e.g. a census) which does have information on education may be required (Corsini, 2010).

### References

Corsini, V. (2010), “Highly Educated Men and Women Likely to Live Longer: Life Expectancy by Educational Attainment”, *Eurostat Statistics in Focus 24/2010*, European Commission, Luxembourg.

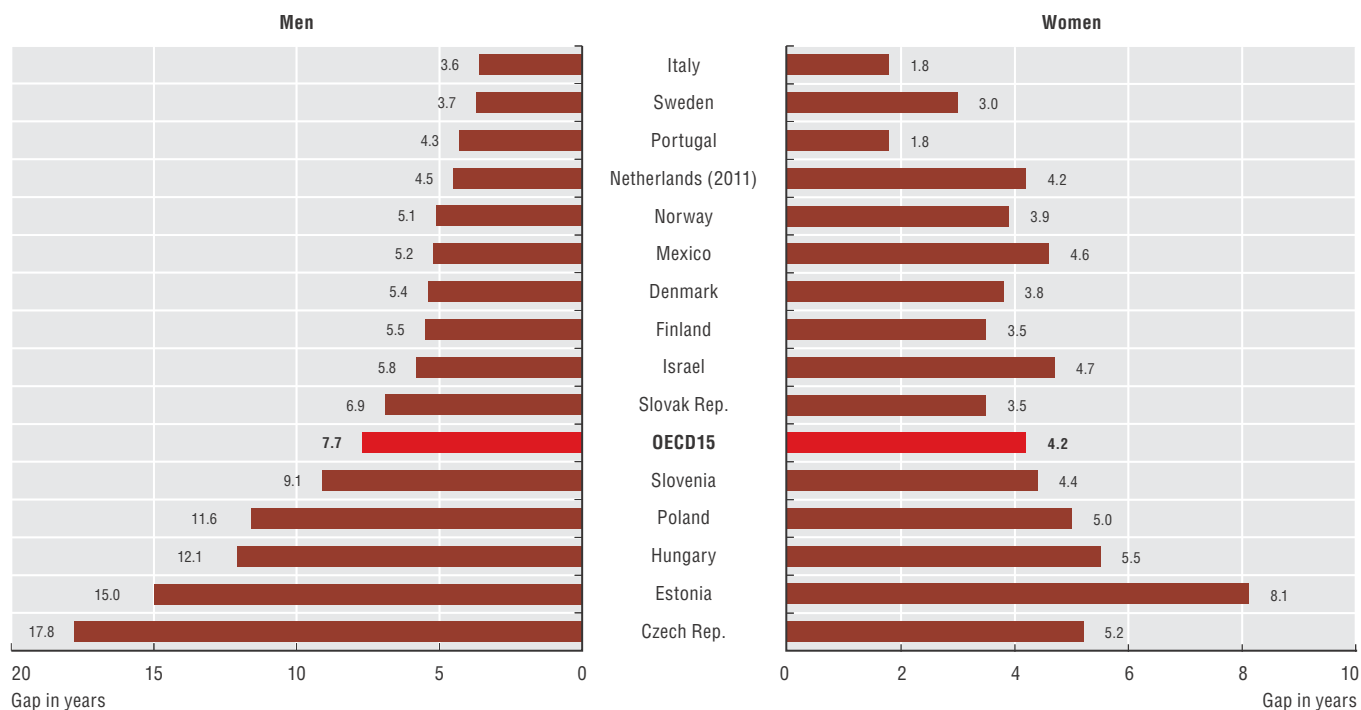
### 3.4. Life expectancy at birth by sex, 2013 (or latest year)



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of life expectancy for the whole population.  
 Source: OECD Health Statistics 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en>.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933280737>

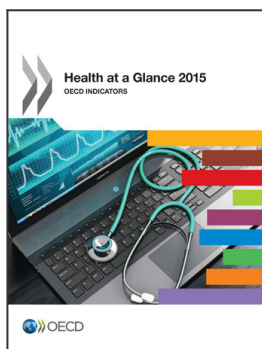
### 3.5. Gap in life expectancy at age 30 by sex and educational level, 2012 (or latest year)



Note: The figures show the gap in the expected years of life remaining at age 30 between adults with the highest level ("tertiary education") and the lowest level ("below upper secondary education") of education.  
 Source: Eurostat database complemented with national data for Israel, Mexico and Netherlands.

Information on data for Israel: <http://oe.cd/israel-disclaimer>

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933280737>



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